

MEXICO'S LONG-AWAITED SURPRISE

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AN ETERNAL STRUGGLE: HOW THE NATIONAL ACTION PARTY TRANSFORMED MEXICAN POLITICS. By Michael J. Ard. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003. Pp. xviii + 228. \$64.95 cloth.)

ELECTORAL COMPETITION AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN MEXICO. By Caroline C. Beer. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003. Pp. xiv + 208. \$45.00 cloth, \$20.00 paper.)

MEXICO'S PIVOTAL DEMOCRATIC ELECTION: CANDIDATES, VOTERS, AND THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN OF 2000. Edited by Jorge I. Domínguez and Chappell H. Lawson. (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. Pp. xxvi + 363. \$75.00 cloth, \$27.95 paper.)

COURTING DEMOCRACY IN MEXICO: PARTY STRATEGIES AND ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS. By Todd A. Eisenstadt. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. xv + 354. \$70.00 cloth.)

FROM MARTYRDOM TO POWER: THE PARTIDO ACCIÓN NACIONAL IN MEXICO. By Yemile Mizrahi. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003. Pp. xii + 224. \$45.00 cloth, \$20.00 paper.)

Paradoxically the Partido Revolucionario Institucional's (PRI) loss in the 2000 Mexican presidential election was both shocking and expected. The PRI had held power forever (seventy-one years) and seemed invincible. It was the largest political party in the country, maintained an unmatched electoral machine and had long enjoyed the support of a biased state adept at using reforms and fraud to help maintain its hegemony. In fact, right up until the elections in July, polls showed the PRI would divide the opposition enough to win the needed plurality. Hence the surprise many felt that evening when official returns showed Vicente Fox of Acción Nacional (PAN) leading the PRI's Francisco Labastida, the electoral computers still running, and President Ernesto Zedillo (the last PRI president?) on national television accepting the PRI's defeat.*

* The irony of this amazing electoral year was made complete when the controversies, allegations of fraud and endless delays expected on the night of July 2 (Fox's birthday at that) characterized instead the U.S. election four months later.

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For most it seemed remarkable, a fundamental transformation in Mexican politics and the long-awaited birth of democracy. And yet, at the same time the 2000 vote was expected. After all, the latest installment in a long series of electoral reforms had divorced the electoral institutions from the PRI government, leveling the playing field and diminishing the likelihood of fraud. Decade-long voting patterns unfavorable to the PRI by and large remained consistent. And the opposition, already controlling numerous statehouses, municipal presidencies, and the Chamber of Deputies, simply won another post. From this angle, it seemed like a small, almost inevitable step and the crowning of a lengthy transition. Indeed, *no hay mal que dure cien años ni un tonto que lo aguante*.

Whether shocking or expected, the PRI's defeat and Mexico's long road to democracy pose some rather obvious questions. How could the PRI lose? How could the PAN—hardly a mass-based party that had never captured more than 27 percent in any presidential election (usually less than 20 percent)—pull it off? When did authoritarianism end and democracy begin? And what happens now? The five books under review provide essential insights into the historic defeat of the PRI and the nature of Mexico's political transition. The single-authored monographs by Ard, Beer, Eisenstadt, and Mizrahi dissect the gradual process of change. They detail the patterns of electoral competition, the mix of negotiations and reforms, the contestation and construction of democratic institutions, the rise of the PAN, and the fall of the PRI. The team assembled by Domínguez and Lawson, in turn, empirically analyze the role the 2000 campaign played in shaping the outcome.

MEXICO'S UNIQUE TRANSITION

The Mexican transition to democracy, as most of the authors here stress, differs fundamentally from the elite-pacted transitions described in the democratization literature (e.g. O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Przeworski 1991). This stems largely from the fact that the PRI-led regime, unlike most authoritarian governments that succumbed to democracy, not only appropriated the language of democracy, but allowed for parties and elections (and other ostensibly democratic institutions). Carefully balancing legitimacy and control (Molinar 1991), the PRI-government (always “new and improved” every six years!) championed change and reform (to capture the discursive battle as a reformer), but always at its own non-threatening pace and under its guidance. The opposition, in the meantime, struggled through both system and non-system channels not so much to create electoral and democratic institutions as to make those already in existence more meaningful.

The authors highlight a variety of factors that make the Mexican transition unique. First and most obvious, the Mexican transition was long,

involving a lengthy series of piecemeal reforms that slowly pried open the system. In *Courting Democracy in Mexico*, Todd Eisenstadt develops a theory of protracted democracy using Mexico as his model. He documents how the government crafted institutions like electoral “courts” as mere “window dressing” (63) and how the opposition rarely (or solely) used these institutional channels to press their demands. Instead, the opposition opted for the informal mechanisms of post-electoral mobilizations and negotiations to register patronage gains and ratchet up institutional reforms. Using post-electoral protests in state elections as his dependent variable—a proxy for non-compliance with the electoral institutions—Eisenstadt employs both statistical and case-study methods to confirm that opposition mobilizations in the 1990s were largely unrelated to the strength or autonomy of the electoral institutions in the states and that the outcome of the negotiations centered more on the strength of the mobilizations by the opposition than on the level of perceived electoral fraud. Only by the late 1990s, he finds, did the opposition begin to accept the legitimacy of the electoral courts and hence reduce their use of post-electoral mobilizations.

According to Eisenstadt’s theory, the growing electoral competition and opposition-led mobilizations nurtured the development of the institutions of electoral democracy, not the other way around. Caroline Beer makes a similar though somewhat broader point equally rooted in dynamic institutional theory. In *Electoral Competition and Institutional Change in Mexico*, Beer, like Eisenstadt, uses both large-*N* statistical analysis (focusing on the thirty-one states) and small-*N* comparative analysis of the states of Guanajuato, San Luis Potosi and Hidalgo to uncover evidence “that increasing electoral competition [at the state level] strengthens representative institutions in ways that decentralize power away from the national executive and improve the separation of powers and therefore has significant consequences for accountability and the rule of law” (21). As competition increases, she shows, it alters incentives and opportunities for politicians and party leaders, forging more autonomous legislatures, participatory methods to select candidates, and demands for greater local control over resources.

A second factor distinguishing the Mexican transition is the role played by political parties. The agency-driven approaches by Eisenstadt and Beer both devote significant attention to the strategies employed by the political parties in using informal channels to press for change and in adapting to rising electoral competition. Using quite different approaches, Michael Ard and Yemile Mizrahi focus on one key protagonist in the Mexican transition: the PAN. In *From Martyrdom to Power: The Partido Acción Nacional in Mexico*, Mizrahi not only traces the party’s origins and ideology, its strategic dilemmas and electoral record, but also explores empirically the impact of electoral competition on the

party's internal rules and organizations (its ties to the community and autonomy of candidates). Mizrahi theorizes that these internal aspects of a party reflect the objectives and strategies of its leaders and, in turn, shape the party's electoral performance. Based on a useful fourfold classification of political parties, Mizrahi finds that the internal rules that allowed the PAN to survive for so long (as a martyr) in a hostile environment, actually "limit its degree of stability and flexibility to adapt to a more competitive environment" (33). The antithesis of the PRI, the PAN rejected attributes it associated with the PRI, like corporatism, strong ties to the community, and even ideological impurities. So upon gaining political office (at the state level), the PAN continued to act like a sectarian party refusing to craft long-term links to the community (except in Guanajuato). In government the Panistas turned out to be "better managers than politicians" (91). According to Mizrahi, this inability to adapt to its new role has made it extremely difficult for the PAN to win in consecutive elections.

From Mizrahi's perspective the PAN was eventually successful at gaining power in spite of its limited flexibility when entrepreneurs and pragmatists took control of the party in the 1980s and 1990s and when Fox hijacked the party's nomination with his own "Amigos de Fox" (pre-) campaign organization. Mizrahi's critical approach, however, contrasts that of Michael Ard. In *An Eternal Struggle*, Ard adopts a broader historical view of the transition and cast the PAN as the prime facilitator. He credits the PAN for accepting its role as a "system party," for its dedication to democratic principles and electoral competition, and its patience and rejection of regime upheaval. "By insisting on political reform and not regime upheaval, the PAN demonstrated the importance of both the strategy and the temperament of the opposition in determining the characteristics of the democratic transition" (9). Ard's central thesis, however, highlights yet a third trait distinguishing the Mexican transition from others: the resolution of the great party conflict over church-state issues. Chronicling the church-state conflict in Mexico since independence, Ard avers that the conciliation between the Catholic opposition (via PAN) and the ruling, revolutionary class (PRI)—an accord that began with the PAN-Salinas bargain in 1988 and culminated with the Salinas political/electoral reforms and normalized relations with the Vatican—set the stage for the emergence of Mexican democracy.

A fourth characteristic that sets the Mexican transition apart is the periphery-to-center or bottom-up route that it took. Beer and Eisenstadt in particular, who use states and municipalities as their primary unit of analysis, emphasize the role of the periphery in shaping the national transition. Eisenstadt demonstrates the role of postelectoral protests in state and local elections and subsequent negotiations in slowly stripping

the PRI of its reserve domain in the periphery (131), while Beer argues that growing electoral competition at the municipal level: a) allowed reformers to springboard to state and national office; b) altered voting behavior and partisan identification that carried over to the national level; and c) prompted demands for a decentralization of power that increased the policy-making authority of local leaders.

DECISION 2000

Whereas the four books just described explore Mexico's protracted transition, research presented in Jorge Domínguez and Chappell Lawson's edited volume *Mexico's Pivotal Democratic Election: Candidates, Voters, and the Presidential Campaign of 2000* focuses squarely on the campaign and the election of 2000. Lawson begins by defining the puzzle (the surprise thesis noted at the beginning): that despite the changes in the political and institutional landscape, the PRI's defeat in 2000 was not a forgone conclusion. To help explain the shock of 2000, the team of researchers analyzes opinion data from the Mexico 2000 Panel Study: "approximately 7,000 interviews in five separate polls over the course of the campaign, using a hybrid panel/cross-sectional design." In the end their analysis confirms that "the campaign mattered" (12).

In the opening segments, Rod Camp, Wayne Cornelius, Lawson and Joe Klesner carefully examine the electoral context. They detail recent changes in the electoral/institutional arena, Mexican perceptions of democracy, shifting patterns of participation, heightened electoral competitiveness, the crystallization of the pro-regime/anti-regime split, trends in partisan dealignment that reduced the PRI's core base of support, and the "erosion of traditional instruments of authoritarian mobilization" (83). The remaining chapters—and the largest portion of the work—evaluate various aspects of the campaign.

Kathleen Bruhn engagingly compares the strategic and tactical decisions of the PRI, PAN (Alliance for Change) and PRD (Alliance for Mexico) campaigns. She discusses the candidate selection procedures, the choice of campaign message, campaign management, and election-day mobilizations. She shows that despite the use of a party primary, the PRI picked a lackluster candidate who failed to develop a strong message and connect with voters, revealing "the difficulties of a party out of sync with its conditions" (152). By contrast, Vicente Fox, with his unconventional style and political charm, not only mobilized supporters to force the PAN leadership to "swallow the unorthodox positions Fox put forward," but fully appropriated (expropriated) the banner of change. As Bruhn notes, "Fox bet on a strategy of change, offering vague promises while attempting to polarize the campaign into 'the PRI or me'" (143).

Among the many unique components of the 2000 election was the PRI's use of a party primary rather than the presidential *dedazo* (finger-pointing) as noted. This sprang from Zedillo's expressed desire to remove himself from the process (though he never did so fully) and the growing militancy of the PRI rank and file. James McCann examines the attitudes and behavior of the bloc of the electorate supporting Labastida versus one of the other PRI candidates (Roberto Madrazo, Manuel Bartlett, and Humberto Roque) in the primary to determine the impact of this historic move. Despite finding socioeconomic, demographic, and partisan differences among the two sets of voters (Labastida supporters reflected the traditional party bases, while the other candidates drew in new PRI supporters and were less firmly committed to the PRI), McCann unearths little support for the negative priming hypothesis: that voters backing the losing candidates will become disengaged in the process and fail to back the party's candidate in the general election. "Whatever the causes, the primary appears to have had little to do with the PRI loss. Quite to the contrary, mobilization behind Labastida during the primary offered a large and lasting bump up in the polls" (177).

Like changes in the electoral process, changes in Mexican media also helped set the stage for 2000. Noting how over two thirds of Mexicans get their information about politics from television, Lawson examines how media covered the campaign and their effect on voters, adding a further chapter to his recent work on the media in Mexico (Lawson 2002). Using multiple sources of data, Lawson concludes that "overall coverage of the 2000 race on Mexico's primary medium was relatively balanced" (199). But did this change really matter? Using the panel survey data, Lawson then shows that "exposure to network news exercised a statistically significant influence on voting behavior," particularly for those who watched news on the rival station, Televisión Azteca (201). Even so, this factor had very limited impact on Fox's margin of victory (about 1.0 percent).

The 2000 election also featured two formal televised presidential debates and one informal debate when the candidates discussed (argued) logistics for the second debate. In a separate chapter Lawson assesses the performance of the candidates and the impact of the debates on voters. He finds that the first debate contributed to the erosion of support for Labastida and helped frame the election as a referendum on PRI's rule. Fox's decisive win in the debate helped tighten the race and alter the candidates strategies. Labastida became more aggressive and Fox toned down his freewheeling style and tried to look more "presidential." But despite the impact of the first debate and the negative impact of "Black Tuesday" (the informal encounter when Fox came off as stubborn and childish), in the end exposure to the debates had very little impact on voting.

Alejandro Moreno, in turn, focuses on the effects of negative campaigning. Rooted in a model of “negativity reception gaps” (this is like the net effect once receptivity differences and competing messages are factored out), Moreno discovers that negative campaigning helped defeat the PRI: that “‘going negative’ worked for Vicente Fox, not by attracting new voters but by influencing many of his main opponent’s partisans to abandon their candidate” (245). By contrast, Labastida’s image was hurt by his own negative campaigning, particularly among party loyalists, prompting a substantial bloc to support Fox in the election.

A common view in Mexico prior to 2000 was that with no second-round voting, the PRI could only be defeated if the opposition were to join forces. Sticking to that story even after the election, pundits often referred to the existence of strategic voting (mass level coordination) to help explain the Fox victory. Testing for this, Beatriz Magaloni and Alejandro Poiré discover that despite evidence of some strategic voting, “a larger proportion of Fox voters came from sources other than the PRD,” including independent voters and disaffected PRI partisans (270). Strategic voting occurred among PRD identifiers who had weak partisan ties, believed Cardenas had a low likelihood of victory, and who held a favorable view of Fox, but much less than many believed and, in the end, was not decisive in the Fox triumph.

“By 2000 the Mexican voter had had enough” (315). But in voting Fox in, what was the electorate really saying? In an effort to determine the nature of the Fox mandate, Magaloni and Poiré also explore the role that issues played in the election. Looking at voters’ and candidates’ positions, the voters’ views on key issues and their evaluations of the incumbent government and the economy, the researchers find further support for the idea that the election pivoted primarily on the PRI-versus-anti-PRI split. But political change was not uppermost in the voters’ minds; instead, they cared most about economic and crime/public safety issues. What was unique in 2000, then, was the public’s evaluating the candidates’ ability to address these salient issues. The mandate for change, the researchers conclude, “was more closely aligned with the performance-oriented ‘throw-the-rascals-out’ mandate typical of normal democracies, rather than the more elaborate ‘let’s-transform-our-polity’ notion of a ‘foundational’ election” (308).

For Mexican observers, perhaps, this work’s central finding that campaign 2000 mattered should not be too surprising. Amazingly, one out of three voters changed their voting intention at some point during the five months prior to the election, resulting in a net shift of between 12 and 15 percent of votes away from Labastida. Such a point could only be confirmed through a panel survey such as the one put together by the Domínguez and Lawson team. But as Domínguez emphasizes in a nicely crafted conclusion, most studies of U.S. and European elections

show that campaigns *do not* matter. In discussing this critical difference, Domínguez ends the work by highlighting a series of factors that tend to shape the role of campaigns and the potential impact of these developments on the future of Mexican elections.

MEXICAN POLITICS PAST AND FUTURE

Mexico's prolonged transition raises a number of rather seductive and often deceptive questions. One is trying to determine when the transition began and when it ended. Disagreement among analysts in answering this question reveals in part that despite the centrality of the concept, they seem to be working with different definitions. For Ard the transition seems to have begun with the emergence of the PAN, while Eisenstadt clearly dates it to the *concertación* of the Salinas period. And while Mizrahi (139) and Ard (x) both point to the defeat of the PRI in the presidential election as the culmination of the transition, Eisenstadt and Beer seem to refer more to the consolidation of democratic institutions as the end point. By focusing on the *consequences* of democratization rather than its causes, Beer, who appropriately disagggregates the concept, envisions democratization as actually taking place prior to the PRI's defeat in 2000. Like Eisenstadt's emphasis on compliance with the electoral "courts," Beer depicts a transition that begins with competition and concludes when "rules and institutions have replaced fraud and protest as a means of selecting leaders" (10). She even refers to the uneven nature of the transition among the states, suggesting that there is in fact more than one. Though a definition of transition is hardly a concern when an elite pact establishes the rules and institutions for a foundational election, its absence when dealing with a protracted transition is somewhat problematic.

Though the nature of the regime clearly meant that political parties would play the lead role, a key question asked by many observers is who was responsible (or to blame) for the transition. Generally, most seem to credit the PAN and/or Fox, blame Salinas, and downplay the role of the PRD and Zedillo. Though Eisenstadt acknowledges the PRD's impact on other actors, he nonetheless calls the PAN "the engine of Mexico's electoral opening" (162). Along with Ard, Eisenstadt demarcates the shift in the PAN's post-1988 strategy to one of collaboration as the pivotal moment in the transition. Yet such a move on the part of the PAN and the PRI might never have occurred had it not been for the rise of Cardenas and the PRD. Facing a formidable revolutionary challenge on his left, worried about a coalescence of an anti-system alliance and needing a congressional ally to pass neo-liberal reforms and satisfy international critics, President Salinas had few choices but to strike a deal with the PAN. Interestingly, by labeling the *concertación* as the "original sin" (242),

Eisenstadt seems to blame Salinas for the party's defeat: "Salinas's strategy backfired . . ." (55). But it is hard to say that Salinas "failed" since he restored presidential and regime legitimacy following the 1988 electoral fraud, bolstered the PRI's appeal in the federal election of 1991, successfully pushed through his economic agenda, hushed many of his international critics, and peacefully transferred power to his hand-picked successor. The fact that the PRI lost power six years later might suggest that Zedillo's strategy backfired, but not Salinas'. But what then was Zedillo's strategy? Here again the same dilemma. Though no one specifically credits or blames Zedillo, many do point to his refusal or inability to use state machinery to favor the PRI. Eisenstadt, for instance, refers to Zedillo's failure to intercede on behalf of local elites as critical in helping end the PRI's monopoly. Indeed in departing from his predecessors, Zedillo distanced himself from the political party, and in what many *Priistas* still consider treason, readily ceded defeat. Was Zedillo then the intellectual author of the democratic transition (he would probably say so) or was he so weakened by events and forces that he was unable to work the system's reformist magic once again? Assigning responsibility for the transition (who failed and who succeeded) is made difficult, of course, by its reliance on a counterfactual. An argument can be made, for example, that by participating in elections over the years and hence lending a measure of legitimacy to the PRI-state's claims of being democratic, the PAN may have actually forestalled system breakdown and democratization rather than hastening it. As Mizrahi correctly observes, "the very conditions that ensured political stability in Mexico delayed the transition to democracy" (13).

The protracted nature of the transition also complicates our reading of the periphery-center dynamic, a long-standing debate in the literature (see, for instance, Crespo 1995). Though the results and arguments presented by both Eisenstadt and Beer are sound and largely convincing, doubts still remain. Even Eisenstadt does not deny the role of national politics in shaping local mobilizations and negotiations, which was the dynamic that led to divisions within the PRI and its eventual defeat. While local conditions certainly shaped the PRD pattern of protests, national politics informed both the PAN's strategic approach and the regime's positions at the negotiating table. But even with growing competition at the state level, it is still hard to say that local political change pushed or even outpaced national democratic change and not the other way around, particularly without comparing the strength of state institutions to federal institutions. Under Salinas it seems more likely that the PRI government simply warded off national change by channeling opposition into newly created democratic spaces along the outer edges of the system, using states and municipalities as bargaining chips to survive and presumably retool the reformist machine. It

was no coincidence then that just as the opposition began to win local elections and assume the reigns of local power, Salinas responded with the Solidarity program to reinvigorate centralized control and thus circumvent the power of the opposition.

In some respects questions about the nature of the Mexican transition and the events of 2000 will soon fall to historians as political scientists turn to the future. In doing so, questions arise: Did the 2000 election constitute a complete break, forcing us to rewrite the chapter on Mexican politics, or was it merely one component of an on-going process? While the PRI-led authoritarian regime has clearly ended, what trends from the transition and the 2000 campaign itself will continue to shape Mexican politics? The authors under review provide some important insights.

At one level, the process of democratic transition in Mexico continues. Struggles to redefine executive-legislative relations, the role of the judiciary, federalism and rules of accountability—so eloquently described by Beer—endure, as does the central role of political parties. “The ‘new’ and, one hopes, more democratic political regime that is emerging,” Mizrahi avers (2), “depends on the fate of its most important players: political parties.” By identifying the challenges facing the PAN in adapting to its new role, Mizrahi offers a useful framework to assess future developments in this area. And though she focuses solely on the PAN, her model nonetheless helps crystallize the challenges facing the PRI as it transits from governing to system party. Citing the cases of Tabasco (2000) and Yucatan (2001) where local *Priistas* rejected legal channels and employed mobilization tactics to articulate their opposition to central electoral authorities, Eisenstadt also highlights an important political development in this area, which was the use of mobilizational tactics by the PRI to protest electoral setbacks: “. . . ironically, just as the opposition parties had finally traded placards for briefcases, the PRI—formerly the staunch rule-of-law champions—took to the streets in conflicts prompting a dozen deaths among *PRIista* ‘dinosaurs’ from different clans” (235).

Like party strategies, Mexican elections have also changed. As Beer documents, electoral competition has created obstacles to traditional machine politics, changed the relationship between citizens and their government, fed new expectations and molded a more sophisticated voter (135, 142–43). Moreover, it seems relatively clear that the system/anti-system dichotomy so important in the recent election (and dating back to the Dominguez and McCann (1996) thesis) and in Fox’s campaign strategy, risk aversion, and maybe even fraud are no longer relevant factors. Nonetheless, the plebiscitary nature of the 2000 election seems to have continued at least through the 2003 mid-term election and perhaps beyond. And though partisan identity will continue to play perhaps the major role in determining votes—and the PRI continues to

enjoy the largest bloc of supporters—partisan attachments, as Klesner, Magaloni and Poiré and others confirm, are weakening.

While much of this sounds positive, the continuation of some recent patterns nonetheless casts a bit of a shadow on the future of Mexican politics. Democratization has strengthened the autonomy of state and federal legislatures and sub-national units, enhanced the mechanisms of accountability and even created more participatory patterns of candidate recruitment, but such trends have also contributed to Fox's inability to get much done. Sub-national fiscal autonomy and an assertive legislature may be mixed blessings, creating gridlock and the use of corruption to grease the wheels as Geddes (1994) has shown in the case of Brazil. Though some may read Beer's work as overly optimistic, she nonetheless ponders this point, asking, for instance, why increasing electoral competition did not lead to greater accountability in the case of Venezuela. Like Beer, Domínguez also highlights certain problems arising from the legacy of the 2000 campaign. These include "candidate-centered campaigns focused on vague themes, reliant on negative advertising and on unelected media barons" as well as a weakening of social attachments, partisanship and "attention to prospective economic fantasies" (341).

In sum, the five works discussed here all contribute to a more thorough and nuanced understanding of the process of change in Mexico and the watershed election of 2000. As such, they will certainly become standard fare for students of "new" Mexican politics. But their appeal and relevance go well beyond the single case. Exemplary in their approaches, the authors ground their work in theory, develop useful frameworks for future analyses, "reintroduce Mexico into the broader debate over democracy in the contemporary developing world" (Beer 18), and contribute to the construction of democratic theory.

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